I am deeply honoured by the invitation you have extended to me to attend your dinner and to say a few words. I do not think I need make a very formal speech, because I feel I am getting to know and appreciate the citizens of Annecy and their warm hospitality. In fact I believe that when this conference - of which I am the Executive Secretary - is over, I shall almost regard myself as a true Annecien.

I am not going to burden you with comments about the importance of the trade meetings which are now under way at Annecy. This you already know. Perhaps you may get the impression sometimes that the lack of pageantry and the names which appear in the headlines of the newspapers may imply that these trade meetings are, as we say in English, "small beer". I can tell you, confidently, that such a view is wrong. The name of Annecy will take its place along with those of London, Geneva and Havana in the history of this great project for the reduction of barriers to international trade.

Reduced to simple terms, the objects of these lengthy and arduous international discussions is that ordinary people all over the world shall be able to trade with each other, to exchange with each other the products of their own industry, with the minimum of restrictions and barriers. You who live so close to a national frontier can appreciate the practical significance of this better than many others. To the extent that we succeed so can the world look forward to an expanding, fruitful and mutually profitable trading. If we fail, the effort will not be made again in our lifetime - and we must resign ourselves to a poorer life, to economic strife and to all the restraints and barriers which have grown like weeds in the years between the two world wars and since.
Just as you, as members of the Rotary Club, represent the various professions and types of commerce in this town, so I represent tonight a profession - the international civil servant. I thought it might interest you if I told you something about the kind of work I have to do from time to time.

You might like to think of my job as something that combines the organizer, the secretary, the housekeeper, the politician (or peace-maker) and the globe-trotter.

Six months ago I was faced with having to find accommodation for a conference of 36 nations, comprising about 700 people, including my own secretariat, requiring hotel rooms, offices, food, first-class communications, police security measures, and so forth. I could continue the list. We were unable to find room at Geneva. Other places were considered. But I decided to take the risk - and believe me, it was a risk in view of my responsibilities to many governments - the risk of sitting a big conference in a town completely, as you might say, inexperienced.

The result, I can assure you, has justified my decision. Your leading citizens - and particularly the committee under Monsieur Decourvrière - have done a wonderful job for us. There have, of course, been difficulties. In particular, the substantial expenses falling upon the larger hotels in opening out of season have led to charges which, because they are comparable to those prevailing in the best hotels in cosmopolitan centres like Paris and the Côte d'Azur - a situation which, on the face of it is unreasonable - has led to some disappointment and misunderstanding. Delegates, I might add, are not wealthy tourists but public officials who, in almost all countries, are not highly paid. I hope, however, that in due course these difficulties will be overcome and that these out-of-season visitors will go back to their countries enthusiastic not only about the beauties with which nature has endowed Annecy, not only about the tradition of fine cuisine for which Savoie is famous, but also with the warm appreciation that their purses have not been strained out of proportion to their enjoyment.